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## THE RELIGIOUS VALUE OF PROPER HOUSING

BY WILLIAM B. PATTERSON,

Secretary, Commission on Social Service and the Interchurch Federation,  
Philadelphia.

In days long past the instruments and agencies of mortality were few and simple. Cain used a bludgeon. That act of murder was raw, and crude, and brutal—utterly inartistic. Then Cain built a city—the first city. And as civilization has increased, as the city has grown, and as our social cruelties have become more refined, so also have our instruments of death and destruction partaken of these elements of “progress.” Hence, we have in the city the slum and the tenement.

Cain, the murderer, left no record of having originated the tenement. This, perhaps, was due to his lack of refinement in the gentle art of taking human life. He did not, therefore, project his murderous mania into the city conditions that were to come with the growth of civilization, preferring to leave to the ingenuity of his descendants the invention of newer and more effective death-dealing methods. Therefore, it has remained for those of later days, and especially for those of America, to invent the tenement. And, very properly, it was located in the city. Thus we find that the city, originally devised by one whose hands were stained with the blood of his brother, produces one of the modern instruments of death; and strange as it may seem, it is only within recent years that our perception has enabled us to place the noisome tenement on the same deadly plane with the bludgeon and the poisoned dagger. After all, the chief difference between the bludgeon of Cain and our tenement house is that while the bludgeon murders without the law, our tenement house kills within the law.

When the Federal Council of the Churches of Christ in America, composed of official representatives of thirty-two religious denominations, formulated an initial social creed in Philadelphia, in December, 1908, it was not quite able (seemingly) to apprehend the religious importance of proper housing; but when the same Federal Council met in Chicago four years later and revised its social pro-

nouncement, a significant advance in the thought of the churches was registered, in that the revised creed featured proper housing as a definite aim of religious effort.

As a matter of plain fact, it is becoming increasingly clear that the author of the decalogue and of the sanitary code is one and the same God. Perceiving this, the religious bodies of America are beginning to manifest a keener appreciation of the necessity of proper housing.

The aim of all true religion is the establishment of the kingdom of God, the coming of which is the great comprehensive ideal of the church. This kingdom we believe to be not only an individual good but also a social state. The ideal city which is to be ushered in with this final consummation is typified in the New Jerusalem—a holy city, a spacious city; and in the blueprints which we have of this city of the kingdom of God we locate its very antithesis of the city which obtains in all parts of the world today.

In the description of the New Jerusalem is no suggestion whatsoever of crowded quarters, of the congestion of peoples, or of insanitation. This city "lieth four-square"—which term must be taken to mean that it is perfect throughout in all of its dimensions. In contrast, we have the American city, the English city and the continental city, each with its herding and massing of human beings, with its enormous death-rate in the congested sections, and its rapidly multiplying processes that make for delinquency, degeneracy, defectiveness, disease and death; and which sinister slants and tendencies project themselves into the generations to come.

And as for the dimensions of the shambles in which, catacomb-like, our poverty is massed, they are as far from the "four-square" ideal of the city of John's vision as the East is from the West. Witness the dimensions of the American tenement house in our large cities: breadth 25 feet, depth 50 to 60 feet, height 50 to 75 feet, with an air-shaft which is generally a well of foul and stagnant air, about 3 feet in diameter. There is still a fourth dimension to the American tenement, which Dr. Walter Laidlaw terms "dividends." One would not be far wrong in saying that this known fourth dimension is by all means the most important. Eliminate it and the problem of the tenement house is just about solved.

The housing problem is inextricably interwoven with the problem of the home and the family, and for this reason, at least, it

must continue to be more and more an object of religious concern. The tenement house is an impediment to God's plan for the home, and no matter to what high degree of physical healthfulness we may raise the tenement, this basic fact will remain. The ideal home can by no stretch of the imagination be located in a tenement, and we would do well if we were to put less emphasis upon the matter of building "model" tenements, and more emphasis upon the necessity of single houses for single families, in order that the home may be preserved.

Dwight L. Moody said of England that it was more in need of homes than of churches. This statement is with equal fitness applicable to all of our American cities; for the situation which there obtains involves a surplus of churches, practically all of which are under-worked, and an appalling deficit of homes.

It is true that the tenement house is a growth which is due to the complexity evolved by our changing social and industrial conditions, and by the great influx of people to the cities. It is true, moreover, that slum conditions which root in improper housing, are to be found in the smaller towns, and even in the country districts as well as in the large cities; but in these former places the slum is an anomaly, whereas, in the great city it is the result of our sweaty haste and heedless commercialism.

True as this is, yet it is equally true that in most of our dealings with the gigantic problem of housing we have been too content to apply remedies and palliatives and correctives, too often without thought of the standards which should actuate our efforts. Witness the history of the first "model" dwelling in the United States, located in New York City, in 1855, by the Workingmen's Home Association, which "model" dwelling soon became one of the worst tenements in the city.

I cannot refrain from drawing attention here to the momentous fact that we are today passing from the old to the new philanthropy. It was the old philanthropy which inspired us to build hospitals and sanatoria, and to load great ships with provisions, and clothing and medical supplies, and send them to the relief of famine-stricken peoples at the other end of the world. So the old philanthropy laid emphasis upon cure, remedy, alleviation. In other words it dealt primarily with effects.

The new philanthropy, while not minimizing in any degree the

utter importance and necessity of hospitals and sanatoria, finds its chief business, however, in its searching for and treatment of causes. It would abolish plagues and epidemics by conforming to the laws of health and sanitation; by giving pure food, pure milk, pure water, healthful homes, and there is a very real sense in which the American and British trained engineer is of vastly more importance to the famine and plague stricken spots than the supplies of the relief ship and the ministries of the physician.

Tuberculosis, meningitis, rheumatism, diphtheria, and the entire train of diseases which play havoc periodically in the congested sections of the great cities—all must be treated. But the new philanthropy discovers in prophylaxis a far more valuable principle and a vastly more important asset than is to be found in therapeutics. In 1912, sickness among the people of the United States cost more than \$700,000,000. During 1912, \$19,000,000 was spent in anti-tuberculosis campaigns. Of this latter sum it is conservatively estimated that less than \$500,000 was spent for preventive work. The question here suggests itself as to what results would have issued if the new philanthropy, which strikes at causes but which does not ignore symptoms, had been able to guide the expenditure of these vast sums of money.

We must face the fact that bad housing and tuberculosis bear the relation to each other of cause and effect; therefore, if we would annihilate this scourge we must, in the first instance, utterly annihilate the breeding spots of the white plague. In permanent net results there is not, to my mind, any question whatsoever but that \$18,500,000 spent in the work of abolishing the causes of tuberculosis would be of infinitely more benefit than the same amount spent in the building of hospitals and sanatoria, which is not to say that these curative agencies are unnecessary.

We have surely progressed beyond the point of some people who dwelt at the base of the cliff, and who were divided into two factions: one declaring that the way to put an end to the mortality that resulted from people falling over the cliff was to place about its edge a strong, durable fence; the other faction contending that the end would better be served by the establishment of a modern ambulance corps at the cliff's base. We face this identical proposition when we take hold of the housing problem,—it matters not from which angle we approach it.

If we are to prevent immorality, crime, disease and premature death, it is for us to blast at the roots of these ills in the social body, and if we are agreed that the tenement house, with its swarms of heterogeneous peoples, and its promiscuity of living conditions, is the prolific breeder of these ills, then it must follow that the tenement, as we know it today, must go. Not until we have apprehended the home and gained a knowledge of the tremendously important part which it has played in history, will we be able to realize the far-reaching significance of the movement for proper housing.

The history of Israel is the history of the family, and throughout the Old Testament the emphasis is on the family descent and continuity. The genealogical record in the book of Genesis and elsewhere; the genealogy of Christ with which Matthew begins his gospel—all these attest the high value which was placed upon the home and the family by those of the early days.

The ancient Jews made ample provision for the home, realizing that what the home is the child will be. The family, home and household—all figure prominently in the ministry of Christ; indeed, primitive Christianity began in the home, and through the home and the family was it propagated. In this respect may we inquire as to the chances of success which Christianity would have had if for the home in the early days had been substituted the tenement house of our day? What chance has God in the average tenement in the congested sections of our American cities? Would not the "family altar" be a travesty under tenement house conditions? Does not even common morality fail to procure more than a precarious lodgment?

Dr. Josiah Strong states:

The Bible knows nothing of the philosophy of evolution as a philosophy, but is full of illustrations of its truths because it is full of references to nature and human life. The individual, the soul, the nation, the church, are all presented as growths needing a favorable soil, the right nurture, the care of the vine-dresser, or the gardener. The parable of the sower and the seed as told in the Gospels brings out especially the nature and truth of environment. The seed which the sower plants is always the same, but its results depend upon the nature of the soil, whether it be stony ground, or by the wayside, among the thorns, or in good soil.

If plant life needs proper soil for its development does not child life likewise require proper environment for its growth and expan-

sion? Will not children growing up with little family life, create homes with less? Important as is physical environment, yet more so is the moral and intellectual setting of a life.

The home today as well as the family, is disintegrating. The pressure of social, industrial and economic forces, coupled with the tendency of people to congregate in the large cities, and of still more people—namely, the immigrants—to colonize, for the most part in the older sections of the cities—all make for an undermining of the home and the decadence of family life.

Of what sinister significance is the testimony adduced from a woman worker among the tenements who appeared before a New York commission and said that, in her opinion, the greatest social evil was not direct prostitution, but “accidental prostitution,” indicating that thousands of children are reared where purity is impossible? Investigations by vice commissions from now to the crack of doom could not yield a more scathing indictment against society than this simple statement of a social worker who spoke from first-hand knowledge of the facts.

What type of citizenship will issue from the tenements where living conditions invariably make for what has been termed “hugger-mugger promiscuousness?” If the home life is not conducive to health, comfort, decency and morality, and safety of life and limb—and assuredly it is not, under tenement house conditions—then are not we of this generation, by our very dallying with this phase of the housing problem, by our dealing with palliatives, amelioratives and remedies, are we not consenting to the enlargement and the aggravation of the problem with the sure expectation of bequeathing it as an unholy heritage to the generations to come?

Karl Marx said of the Anglican Church that it “would rather lose the thirty-nine articles than one-thirty-ninth of its income.” To make this serious charge against one communion is obviously unfair, because in the realm of business, and especially that business which has not yet begun its approach to regeneration, the church creeds, Christian principles and religious perceptions are ignored if not forgotten; and the type of *soi-disant* Christian, who profits through the shame, degradation, vice and crime of those who are compelled to occupy his death-dealing tenements, is he whose brain is divided as is the hull of an ocean liner, into separate, distinct, non-communicating compartments. In one he keeps his business, in another his

politics, in another his domestic affairs, in another his so-called social life and in still another that which he is pleased to term his "religion." And it is quite often the cowardly boast of this type of "Christian" that he does not permit his "religion" to enter into his politics or his business.

Happily this type is becoming lyterian. The chief lesson of the recent men and religion movement, the salient feature of all its campaigns throughout the United States, was in the unequivocal pronouncement that unless a man was Christian in all of his relations in life, and unless his religion dominated all of his actions, such man could not possibly be Christian in any of his relations.

In his story, *The Mansion*, Dr. Henry Van Dyke, makes clear as crystal the incontrovertible fact that the man who extorts, even with the sanction of the law, high rentals, and big dividends from the lowly dwellers in noxious tenements on earth thus elects himself to a poor "abiding place in the Father's house of many mansions." And the advanced thought of the church today goes even beyond this point, for does it not vision the assembling, before the bar of infinite justice, on an indictment of murder, of all who are guilty of profiting at the expense, and thus conniving in the debauchery, degradation and death of those men and women whose dull, leaden lives were lived in the tenements?